

STIGMA

Stigma is when someone is judged or experiences discrimination over something that distinguishes them from others – things like culture, gender, race, socioeconomic status, health, and more. People with chronic pain experience stigma from people in their lives including family, friends, co-workers and perhaps most challengingly, health care providers.

STIGMA AND CHRONIC PAIN

- Despite advances in research and health care, chronic pain is still commonly misunderstood by many health care providers, which can be extremely difficult when trying to access care for pain.
- Without training in chronic pain, negative stereotypes or false personal beliefs can impact a provider's ability to provide non-stigmatizing care and can leave the person with chronic pain feeling like it's all in their head.

WHAT IS THE IMPACT?

- You may know first-hand the impact of stigma, but it is far reaching and can result in different challenges for different people.
- The stigma associated with chronic can result in loss of status, work, social connections and access to health care.
- This in turn can make people more reluctant to seek care or continue treatment.
- For some, experiences of stigma can be more debilitating than the chronic pain itself.
- The overdose crisis in BC has led to unintended impacts on people living with pain who rely on opioid medications to live well, with many being weaned or forcibly tapered off their medications with no alternative options for managing pain.

STEPS TO REDUCE STIGMA

Everyone holds responsibility for reducing stigma against chronic pain, but some ways you can take action include:

- **Connecting with others:** You are not alone in experiencing stigma; meeting other people who have experienced stigma can help you feel less alone.
- **Remembering you are NOT your condition:** Don't be defined by your pain – you live with pain; you are not your pain!

- **Remembering it's not personal:** Other people's judgements often come from a lack of understanding so try not to take it too personally.
- **Sharing your own experience of pain:** Education is a powerful tool in reducing shame and misunderstanding.
- **Saying something:** When you hear people making stereotypical or inaccurate comments about pain or people who live with pain, it's ok to speak up.

RESOURCES

- <https://www.instituteforchronicpain.org/understanding-chronic-pain/healthcare-system-failings/how-to-end-the-stigma-of-pain>
- <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5729132/>